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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

May 2010

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The May luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, May 20, 2010, at noon at the home of Society member Dot Phillips at 222 North Beach Boulevard. We will have our usual catered lunch, and Dot will give us a tour of the house, which has been restored since Hurricane Katrina. Parking will be available on Beach Boulevard across the street from the house. *Reservations are required* and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call *by noon on Wednesday, May 19*. Because we are meeting in a private home, we are limiting the number to forty people, and we must insist that there be no late reservations. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still several months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Saturday, October 31, 2009, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House.



Toulme-Phillips House (c. 1840)
222 North Beach Boulevard
Bay Saint Louis, MS

Renaissance of a Magnificent Beachfront Home, Or The Old Lady Has Worn Many Gowns

By Charles Gray

The beachfront homes of Bay Saint Louis, one dating from 1787, were a source of great pride to the residents of "The Bay" until Hurricane Katrina devastated so many of them. At the end of that fateful day in 2005, only seventeen

homes on Beach Boulevard remained in restorable condition.

Among those lucky survivors of Hurricane Katrina was the home of Mrs. Dorothy Phillips and the late Milton A. (Bud) Phillips. Mrs. Phillips had remained in the house to render whatever help might be possible to prevent its total destruction. When the first wave crashed into the front of the house sending water pouring through the windows and doors, Mrs. Phillips dashed to the rescue with a mop and bucket, only to be reminded by her brother that one cannot mop up an ocean. The photo of the house taken after the storm makes it clear that the

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10:00AM — 3:00PM
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**MISSION STATEMENT**

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

Post-Katrina,
2005

survival of the residents and of the structure was, in a word, a miracle.

The earliest mention we have of the house is that it was the home of John Baptiste Toulme, an early mayor of Shieldsboro (Bay St. Louis). Although photography began as early as 1839, it did not reach the Mississippi Gulf Coast for many years. We have no pictures of the house from this period, but historians and architects under the auspices of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History recreated the present configuration, shown in the photograph on p. 1, from evidence remaining with the structure.

In 1915 it was the home of T. L. Trawick, principal of the Bay

St. Louis High School. It had undergone one of its several renovations. The brick columns extended through the roof of the porch and were topped with cast cement spheres. The upper floor had two gabled and polygonal dormers.

About 1921, after their home at 422 South Beach Boulevard burned, Lucien Myrtille Gex and his wife, Maria Victoria Demourelle Gex purchased the house from the Trawicks.

By 1930 photographs of the house show the separate dormers had been combined and a screen porch added between them. This is basically the configuration familiar to current residents as portrayed in the next photograph. This was the

The T. L.
Trawick House in
1915



Pre-Katrina

house that Mr. and Mrs. Phillips rented in 1954 and subsequently bought.

Furniture from the aunts, Stella, Ethel, and especially the collections of Wena Gex, still comprise the major furnishings of the house, all of which were seriously damaged in Katrina but, like the house, have undergone stunning renovation.

Reflections of Hancock County Collected By S. G. Thigpen

Compiled and edited by
Eddie Coleman

Eyewitness to a Duel

Many steamboats plied up and down Pearl River in the old days carrying freight of many kinds up river and bringing back the products of the farms adjacent to the river. There were landings at almost all the bluffs along the river. The old maps show what is now Walkiah Bluff as Leslie's Landing

where people received freight and shipped cotton, wood, and other products. In fact, Pearl River was so important as an artery of transportation that the government kept what was called a snag boat, or dredge, in the river to keep it open for navigation. So great was the traffic on Pearl River that several men at Gainesville and Pearlington owned and operated boats on the Pearl. The basis for the fortunes of many of these old timers came from the river trade. Back then there were no sources of fuel except wood. Great quantities of wood were cut and hauled to New Orleans. The steamboats on the river all used wood for their operation and to keep them supplied with wood gave work to many men.

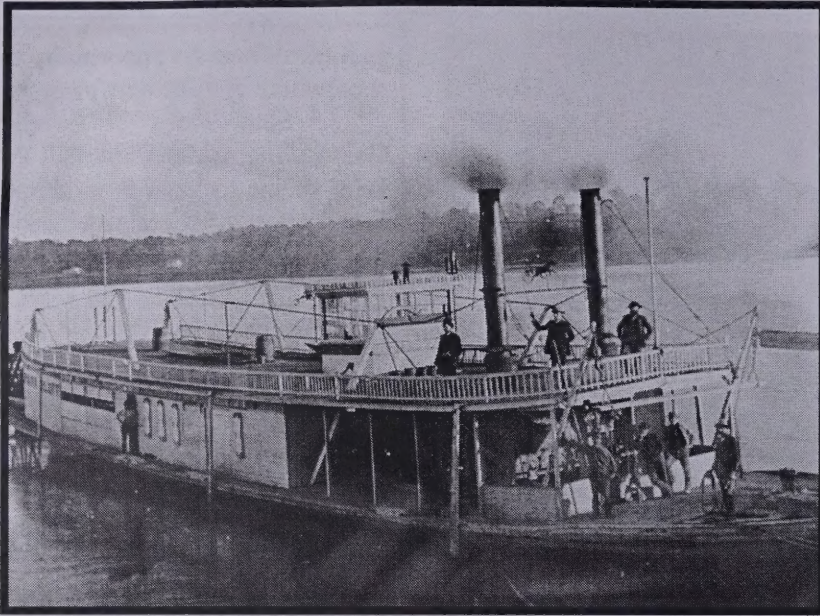
Mystery, adventure, and romance abounded in the transportation business on the lower reaches of the Pearl. Energetic and adventurous young men looked upon the river as their great opportunity to attain fortune. They had seen Captain Bill Poitevent, Bill Whitfield, and others make big money in this business. Young men liked to get jobs on the boats

as it gave them an opportunity to go somewhere and see new places.

Sam Russ Poitevent of Gainesville, son of Capt. Bill Poitevent, seems to have been about the best known of these river captains of the old days. He seems to have been a hard driving, energetic man of more than ordinary ability and with an unusual knack for getting things done. He practically grew up on his father's boats operating on Pearl River. His childhood home was his father's big mansion which stood on the bluff at Gainesville.

While still a young man Sam Russ Poitevent owned the biggest steamboat on the river. He named his boat for himself, the *S. R. Poitevent*. On it he had the loudest whistle which he blew often. In fact, it had such a distinctive sound that people could identify the vessel from miles away. Taking pride in making his boat the fastest and best looking on the river, he constantly made changes and improvements to it. He was soon hauling the biggest cargoes, going the furthest after them, and delivering them the quickest. Sam was a merchant as well as a boat captain. He kept on his boat a supply of things people needed which he traded for produce of the people along the river. He used what we call modern methods to attract business. He had a man on his boat who could play the banjo and the fiddle and Negro buck-dancers who put on a show to attract people to his boat.

Sam Poitevent kept a full crew on his boat. If there were obstacles in the way, he cleared them out with his own men—he did not wait for the snag boat. In this way he made better time, and as a result, he got plenty business. He did not stop at Columbia where the river narrowed as did most boat captains, nor did he stop at Monticello where only a few ventured, but he went on



Perhaps the *S. R. Poitevent* was similar in construction and appearance to this boat of the same era.

up as far as Georgetown. He would accept cargo of every kind to and from any place on the river and to New Orleans. From the information available, he must have been a bold, daredevil kind of fellow who would attempt the impossible and then do it.

When he was a boy in Pearlington, Sam T. Russ of Picayune, a second cousin of Sam Russ Poitevent, remembers seeing the proud *S. R. Poitevent* steam through Pearlington, whistles blowing and loaded with four to five hundred bales of cotton, stacked up even around the pilot house. At ten dollars a bale Poitevent would get anywhere from four to five thousand dollars freight on one cargo, and that was real money back then. Recognizing the *S. R. Poitevent* when they heard the whistles screaming, most residents in Pearlington would hurry down to the river to see the flashy steamboat pass by. It must have been quite a spectacle!

John Langston, who has lived in Picayune ever since 1917 when I first came here and I don't know how much longer, was an eyewitness to a duel seventy-five years ago between Sam Poitevent and an-

other man. John lived his first few years at Pearl River, LA., and his uncle worked on the *S. R. Poitevent*. On John's visits to his uncle, he had come to know Mr. Poitevent.

About 1888 the *S. R. Poitevent* stopped at the little village of Pearl River. Capt. Poitevent went uptown to a barroom across the road from the depot. In the bar he met an enemy. He invited the man to have a drink with him. After the drink the two men stepped outside. John, then eight or nine years old, saw the two men stop near where he stood. What first attracted his attention was that he heard Poitevent say to the other man, "After what you have done, both of us cannot live—one has got to die!"

According to John the man tried to talk Sam out of fighting him, but Sam would not give in. He kept telling the man that after what had happened both of them could not live—that one had to die. He did not talk in an angry tone but in a very firm tone. When the man saw that Sam was not going to give in, he said, "Sam, I am not going to fight you. You have a much better

pistol than I have, and you know that I don't have a chance with you."

Sam quickly reached for his pistol, a pretty shiny thing, saying, "Here, you take my pistol and give me yours if that is what is holding you back!" Sam reached for the man's pistol while handing him his own. The man again tried his best to talk Sam out of a fight, but Sam kept telling him that what he had done was unforgiveable and that one of them must die. Sam told him to walk off whatever distance he wanted and he could have the first shot, saying, "You had better kill me with that first shot."

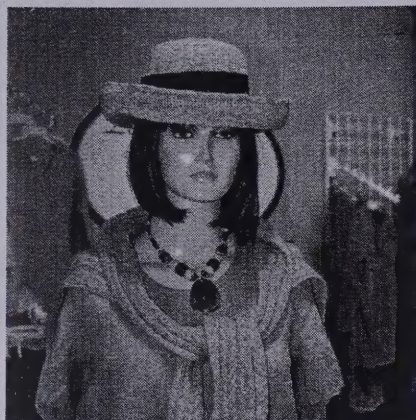
The man walked off six or eight steps, turned, and fired. The bullet shattered Sam's right arm, and his pistol dropped to the ground. Sam quickly reached down with his left hand, picked up the pistol, and shot the man through the heart."

Sam Poitevent lost his right arm—it had to be amputated. The loss of his arm slowed him down, but he still captained the biggest and fastest boat on the river until traffic dwindled so much on account of the railroad that the boat business was no longer profitable.

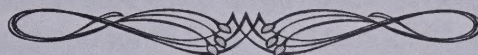
Sam was never tried. People generally sympathized with him and even admired him for giving his enemy a fair chance. It was generally agreed that according to the standards of that day the killing was justified. Sam Russ Poitevent died in 1904 at the age of fifty-two and was buried in Gainesville.

An era in the early history of this country ended about the time that Sam Poitevent, a prominent figure in the life of the river, passed away. A new era had dawned with the coming of the railroad!

Thigpen, S. G. *Pearl River: Highway to Glory Land.* Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1965.



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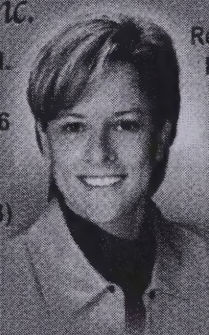
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Lost Churches of Mississippi

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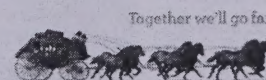
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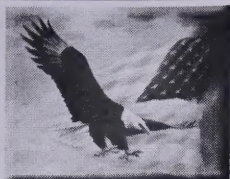


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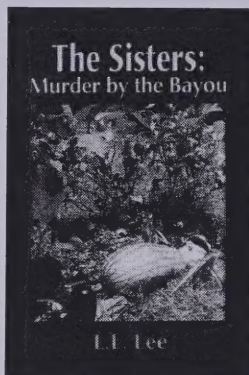
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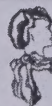
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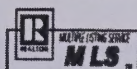
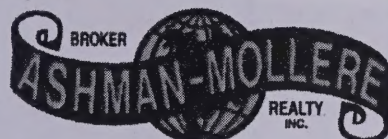
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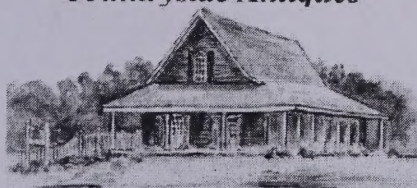
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